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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRUSSELS 001543

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SUBJECT: EU INFORMAL DEFENSE MINISTERIAL APRIL 5-6

Classified By: USEU External Affairs Officer Andrew Erickson
for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

Summary

11. (C) The EU Informal Defense Ministerial in Brussels on April 5/6 endorsed and appeared to expand the concept of the EU rapid reaction force, with Hirep Solana identifying as its elements rapid EU institutional decision-making, a planning cell, and battle groups. Solana explained that the purpose of the battle groups was to provide the EU with "the means to apply the European Security Strategy". On Bosnia, Defmins discussed the way forward with NATO, and appeared to reach informal consensus that the current way forward and division of tasks (with PIFWCs continuing under current arrangements) is acceptable to the EU. Following the informal, Solana on April 7 approved the draft General Concept on Bosnia, which can now be formally approved on April 15 by the PSC, and then moved up the EU chain to COREPER and the Council, with final approval likely April 23rd. END SUMMARY

Capabilities the Key

12. (U) Following April 5th discussions, Hirep Solana told the press and invited diplomats that the first day's discussions had focused on capabilities, and the EU's need to "be ready to act quickly" in the event of a crisis. There were different strands to this. One was the importance of the new 2010 Headline Goal, intended to enhance EU interoperability, deployability, and sustainability. "The idea" guiding the EU, said Solana, "is to have the means to apply the European Security Strategy". Solana said that the focus needed to be giving the EU the means to respond to several crises simultaneously. A skeptical press corps pushed the Hirep hard on specifics, but Solana was reserved.

Ministers Endorse the
Battle Group Concept

13. (C) Irish Defmin Smith noted that the Franco-UK-German Battle Groups concept had been favorably received by all EU member countries at the ministerial, and could be seen as having the informal endorsement of the group. According to a Council Secretariat contact speaking on April 8, the Battle Groups idea can now be seen to have the informal endorsement of the member states, increasing the likelihood that it will be formally folded into the 2010 Headline goal at the appropriate political juncture.

14. (U) On April 5, Solana stated that the EU intends to have its incipient planning cell functioning by the end of the Irish Presidency in June, and the first battle group on line by 2007. Solana remarked at the press conference that the EU's ability to respond rapidly rests on three elements: flexible decision-making, speedy planning, and a rapid response capability such as Battle Groups. He was notably imprecise about where the speedy planning would take place. It should be noted that in his intervention Solana repeatedly underscored the need to work in harmony with NATO.

Bosnia Transition

15. (C) We debriefed Council Secretariat working-level officials on April 7 and 8 on the Bosnia transition. These informed interlocutors, who attended the defense ministers informal and who actually drafted the draft General Concept for Bosnia, told us the following:
-- exchanges at the defense ministerial on Bosnia were primarily focused on force generation, with Solana expressing concerns that there would be shortfalls;
-- according to one official present, the meeting was characterized by "lots of small countries offering up minor contributions; Solana was clearly concerned that this was inadequate;" and,
-- there was general consensus that the current state of NATO-EU agreement on task delineation constitutes "a workable starting point" but that there was a need for operational

commanders on the ground to eventually work out clearer understandings.

16. (C) Following the defense ministerial, Hirep Solana on April 7 approved the Council Secretariat's draft General Concept. This document sets down the strategic parameters of the security and stabilization tasks for the EU in Bosnia. Solana's approval seems to reflect his comfort level with the outcome of the discussion at the informal ministerial, and clears the way for the draft to be presented to the Political and Security Committee (PSC) on April 15, where if approved, it would go on to COREPER on April 21 for clearance prior to final approval by the Council on April 23. There are no surprises in the concept, which accepts command and control arrangements running from DSACEUR through AFSOUTH to the EU OpCommander in Bosnia.

Other issues: Defense Armaments
Agency, Military role for GWOT?

17. (C) According to our Council contacts, another notable issues were discussed at the informal ministerial. Following a presentation by its British Head of the Agency Establishment Team, Nick Whitney, there was an inconclusive debate about what sort of entity the Defense Armaments and Capabilities Agency would be. Would it be a proper agency with a budget and a staff like the Commission, or would it remain a secretariat with very limited resources like the Council Secretariat? Clearly the debate was just beginning on this issue, although it was a debate of some urgency, given Solana's imperative to get the project operational by the end of 2004. Finally, at the CHODs meeting on 7 April, there was some discussion of the potential for an EU military role (a "second pillar role") in the war on terrorism. This conversation was spurred by the appointment of the new EU anti-terrorism coordinator. It was extremely preliminary, limited to traditional military tasks and consequence management, we were told.

Comment

18. (C) The ever-cautious Solana's decision to push the draft Bosnia General Concept forward to the PSC indicates that Solana believes he is on solid ground with defense ministers on the parameters of the EU's proposed Bosnia operation, following the April 6 discussion with ministers. We understand that there are no surprises in this document, as it endorses a DSACEUR/AFSOUTH/EUFOR chain of command, and accepts NATO and U.S. redlines.

19. (C) The informal endorsement of defense ministers of the UK-French-German Battle Groups concept was expected. We expect that the concept will be folded into the EU 2010 Headline Goal at the appropriate political opportunity, and will become the basic "cost" to member states wishing to join "structured cooperation" in the future -- if this element of the Constitution is ever adopted.

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